

REMIXED NATIONS: DOMINICAN-PUERTO RICAN NATIONALISM IN SIETENUEVE'S HIP-HOP

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This essay studies Hip-Hop by Sietenueve, a Puerto Rican MC of Dominican descent, as a rewriting of Puerto Rican nationalism which makes room for a dual national identity. In doing so, the essay focuses on the emergent point of view of the second generation of the Dominican diaspora in Puerto Rico and on its novel articulations of national identity. Operating within broader aesthetic networks of Hip-Hop and the Caribbean, Sietenueve revisits Puerto Rican icons so as to counter the homogenizing cultural patterns resulting from neoliberalism and at the same time unmoor nationalism from traditional hierarchies and open it up to the Dominican diaspora. Moreover, Sietenueve imagines a poetic link to an ancestral Dominican homeland and thus replaces notions of rootedness with liberating motifs of mobility and creativity. In that sense, Sietenueve's Hip-Hop persona is emblematic of a Dominican second generation in Puerto Rico that is empowered by its double ability to remix and redefine both outmoded Puerto Rican icons and physically distant Dominican lands.

Introduction

In the fall of 2008, Sietenueve, a rapper born in Puerto Rico to Dominican parents caught the island's attention by rebuking Reggaeton artist Daddy Yankee for endorsing Republican John McCain's presidential campaign. In his song "Quédate callao" ("Shut up" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xaC0YmE00z8>) Sietenueve chastised Daddy Yankee for supporting someone who "does not care about the funerals/. . .wants to buy the whole planet,/ build a giant shopping center,/ sell us puppets. . . [, and] has never valued us" ("no le importan los velorios/. . . quiere comprar el planeta/, hacer un shopping gigante/ y vendernos marionetas/. . . [y] nunca nos ha valorado"). So far Sietenueve's position is understandable

considering Puerto Rico's politically subordinate position vis-à-vis the US. However, at the end of the song the rapper endorses Puerto Rican nationalist icon Pedro Albizu Campos ("Yo endoso a Don Pedro Albizu Campos"), which is a surprising statement considering that Sietenueve is an artist of Dominican descent in a society that routinely discriminates, on the basis of national identity, against his ancestral kin. That is, Albizu Campos was a Twentieth-Century leader of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party who, as Arcadio Díaz Quiñones has notably underlined, proposed a homogenous national ethnic essence defined by the European Hispanic element and thus subordinated racial Others (1997 75). Consequently, Sietenueve's resuscitation of a nationalist icon and nationalism demands further inquiry because nativist exclusionary ideas like Albizu Campos's have been the basis of discrimination against Dominicans and other immigrants in Puerto Rico. Sietenueve's embrace of Albizu Campos, then, contains radical implications concerning national identity and nationalism. Firstly, Sietenueve's is certainly not the same Puerto Rican nationalism associated with xenophobia, which thus warrants an investigation of the terms in which this nation is redefined. Secondly, by assuming a Puerto Rican identity, Sietenueve highlights the discursive process whereby the second-generation offspring of migrants construct their national self.

The abovementioned song answers the question about the national loyalty of the second generation of Dominican migrants, which sociologist Jorge Duany has thus formulated: "As Puerto Ricans of Dominican ancestry lose their foreign accents, acquire U.S. citizenship, and marry non-Dominicans, do they continue to identify with their parents' homeland or do they shift their allegiances to the host society?" (2005 260). While Sietenueve's song identifies with the new society, the issue gains complexity when we consider other statements in which the rapper calls himself the Puerto Rican from Hispaniola ("El boricua de Quisqueya"), as he does on the song "Hip-No," (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iTWVQPER3n4>) and claims a mixed musical ancestry combining Puerto Ricans Ismael Rivera and Rafael Cortijo and Dominicans Johnny Pacheco and Fernandito Villalona, as he states in "Nostalgia" (*Trabuco*, 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BoholfcnT1g>). Thus, the Puerto Rican national identity that Sietenueve and other Puerto Rican rappers of Dominican parentage –such as Velcro and Welmo– embrace, transcends the exclusivism traditionally associated with nationalism.

Furthermore, as I intend to explore in this essay, the national discourse that Sietenueve constructs gains its legitimacy from its explicit desire to represent marginal identities which exceed and question hegemonic representations of Puerto Ricanness. Thus, in exploring Sietenueve's portrayal of a Dominican-Puerto Rican identity, I will underline broader collective networks and aesthetics of Caribbeanness and Hip-Hop, which provide paradigms from which to rewrite Puerto Rican national icons so as to make them more inclusive and at the same time counter the homogenizing impulse of neoliberalism.

So far the study of the Dominican experience in Puerto Rico has focused mainly on the first generation migrant population primarily from a sociological experience. Especially, Duany himself over the last two decades has lead the way in constructing a profile of this demographic with detailed statistical and ethnographic analysis of its class, racial, and gender facets in stages dating back to the post-Trujillo initial waves in the 1960s through the present. Duany's observations about the overarching tension with the hostile receiving society concern me as they presuppose a formidable obstacle to the formation of a bi-national identity. Particularly, Duany, Hernández Angueira, and Rey stressed in 1995 the racist Puerto Rican stereotyping of Dominicans as darker than locals, criminal, and generally employed within the service sectors: "Poor, black, and foreign, Dominicans are a minority in a triple sense: economical, racial, and ethnic" (1995 55). Dominican settling and marriage patterns don't come as a surprise as the community has tended toward an "ethnic encapsulation" evident in their occupying well-defined neighborhoods in Santurce and Río Piedras and in their marrying within the community (1995 57-58). While not necessarily cancelling the tensions with the receiving society, a set of transnational practices links the community to the Dominican Republic and provides uplifting hues in this otherwise bleak picture. Thus, as Duany has stated in *Blurred Borders* Dominicans have established Little Santo Domingo in the local cityscape by setting up businesses, social clubs, and branches of their island's political parties. Moreover, an increasing number of documented migrants frequently travel back to the island and vote in elections there (2011 198-206).

Comparatively more focused on the cultural aspect of the Dominican experience, Yolanda Martínez San Miguel has explored representations of diverse sentiments from both

locals and migrants spanning jokes, graffiti, music, and literature. These renderings embody a heavily contested “debated and ‘open’ intra-national border in which there is an attempt to define a space where the migrant experience impacts those who have not left their national territory, even those who have returned from the United States” (2003 166). This border is thus constructed by consciously or unconsciously anti-Dominican representations as well as Merengues and essays, in which locals and migrants highlight the progressive hybridization of both sides of the equation. Her reflection on essay collections by Dominican intellectuals Eugenio García Cuevas and Miguel Angel Fornerín is particularly valuable because it highlights the authors’ attempts to create a “Pan-Caribbean intellectual gaze through which to incorporate the Dominican element to the Puerto Rican intellectual world” (2003 196). Martínez San Miguel thus charts a fertile territory for the study of an explicitly named Dominican-Puerto Rican experience within the confines of cultural representation.

At the same time, the second generation, one which by virtue of a Puerto Rican upbringing faces more urgently the need to consider their bi-national experience, if not identity, is still uncharted territory. Perhaps due to the comparatively smaller size of this demographic or perhaps to the higher virulence of anti-Dominican sentiments, the lack of study of this generation in Puerto Rico pales in comparison with that of the Dominican-American experience. The second generation in the U.S. has attained cultural prominence through the work of writers such as Julia Álvarez and Junot Díaz and has inspired explorations of their transnational identity, especially their linguistic adaptations (Sagás and Molina 2004 10).

A veritable mouthpiece for the second generation of the Dominican diaspora in Puerto Rico, Sietenueve boasts a career that can be read as a prolonged construction of interconnected subject positions within the Caribbean and Hip-Hop cultural webs. An MC born in 1979 in the San Juan neighborhood of Santurce, Puerto Rico, to Dominican parents, this artist emerged as part of the socially conscious group Conciencia Poética, and started his solo career with the 2003 album *El pro-greso*. This production positioned Sietenueve within the national and Caribbean music scene by citing in its album title and title track a landmark Salsa hit of the same name by Roberto Roena and by including collaborations with local Jazz musicians Coco

Barez, William Cepeda, and Jerry Medina. His 2007 CD *Trabuco* has expanded on similar patterns and lyrically honed in on Afro-Caribbean culture.¹

This linking of Hip-Hop and Caribbean Afro-Diasporic music has been augmented by Sietenueve's collaborations with Cuban Hip-Hop acts Obsesión and Los Aldeanos. Sietenueve's song "Guasábara" ("War" in the Taíno language, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lqXAWfxZdfU>) from *Trabuco* features an extended verse from Magia, a member of Obsesión, expanding on the song's general condemnation of warfare by supporting Puerto Rico's struggle against U.S. imperialism. Returning the favor to the Cuban Hip-Hop scene, Sietenueve appears on the track "Sangre guerrera" ("Warrior Blood") by Los Aldeanos' El Bi on his 2010 CD "Viva Cuba libre" ("Long Life Free Cuba") (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eyWcBxx04nE>). The song's video adds a visual link between both islands by showing a package apparently containing the underground track being passed from hand to hand in Cuba and ultimately in Puerto Rico, where it is handled among others by Sietenueve and Velcro.

Sietenueve inserts himself in a Hip-Hop genealogy which prefigures his articulation of a transnational identity through critical memory. Hip-Hop's diasporic identity does not only rest on its African-American basis but is also apparent in early DJs Kool Herc's and Grandmaster Flash's Afro-Caribbean national origins and in the Puerto Rican ancestry of members of early b-boy groups such as the Rock Steady Crew and the New York City Breakers.² The aesthetic implications of Hip-Hop's diasporic foundation have already been hinted at by Stuart Hall when describing "the black experience as a diaspora experience, and the consequences which this carries for the process of unsettling, recombination, hybridization, and 'cut-and-mix'." Hall further underlines the impact of this "cut-and-mix" praxis on the connection to the communal past: "There can be no simple 'return' or 'recovery' of the ancestral past which is not re-experienced through the categories of the present: no base for creative enunciation in a simple reproduction of traditional forms which are not transformed by the technologies and the identities of the present" (1996 163). This transformative rendering of the past, and I would add, of the ancestral and the present homes, is also highlighted in scholarship more exclusively dedicated to Hip-Hop's sampling practice. For instance, Thomas G. Schumacher situates

sampling in “the tradition of Signifying through the formal revision of patterns of representation, i.e. through the inflection of previous texts in new texts” (2004 451). Just as Schumacher justifies sampling by recognizing the genealogy of signifying famously traced by Henry Louis Gates, Richard Shusterman legitimizes “the pleasures of a deconstructive art –the thrilling beauty of dismembering (and rapping over) old works to create new ones, dismantling the prepackaged and wearily familiar into something stimulatingly different” (2004 462). While both aforementioned scholars attempt to explain sampling as part of the African-American experience or based on aesthetic reasons, I would like to channel their emphasis on recontextualization and deconstruction of past texts toward the broader diasporic representation about which Hall speaks. That is, Hip-Hop sampling engages in a hybridizing and refashioning process from which the past and the home cannot come out untouched. Rather, the multiple contexts inhabited by an artist and the texts she or he cites will produce a shiftiness that impacts the nation that she or he re-imagines. This slipperiness has as its constructive upside an openness to reinvention from which both sampling and migration gain strength.

El jíbaro: the remix

Within this Caribbean context, the national identity invoked by Sietenueve in “Quédate callao” has a meaning which contrasts dramatically with nationalism’s exclusionary applications. In returning to this key issue, I would like to extend a dialogue started by recent commentators of Puerto Rican nationalism. While Carlos Pabón’s *Nación Post-Mortem* (2002) provided a seemingly final critique of the island’s national identity on the basis of its exclusion and oppression of diverse racial, class, cultural, and gender categories, recent reappraisals from cultural critics such as Duany and Raquel Z. Rivera, among others, identify Puerto Rican nationalism’s collaborative functioning alongside precisely the same communities which it has been accused of marginalizing. Duany, who in his landmark study *Puerto Rican Nation on the Move* (2002) studied the construction of a transported Puerto Ricanness among migrants to the U.S., has lately spoken of a cultural nationalism deployed by proponents who “are primarily celebrating or reviving a cultural heritage, including the vernacular language, religion, and

folklore.” Cultural nationalism, furthermore, “conceives of a nation as a creative force based on a unique history, culture, and territory” (2007 53). Duany’s emphasis on cultural practices as the basis of national identity distinguishes it from a hard-line political nationalism more preoccupied with sovereignty and enables a study of a diasporic Puerto Ricanness.

In turn, Rivera shows a heightened awareness of the exclusive underbelly of Puerto Rican nationalism, and suggests its redefinition through an appreciation of its social purposes and the possibility of its transformation through critical interpretation: “I am all for cultural nationalism’s defense of Puerto Rican traditions and roots as long as the past is viewed with a critical perspective and not a delusional nostalgia. As long as patriarchy, class exploitation, racism, xenophobia do not keep being reproduced” (2007 230). As examples of usages of national identity which transcend its frequently accompanying exclusionary patterns, Rivera cites musical practices such as Hip-Hop and Bomba, which in the New York diaspora have allowed collaboration between Puerto Ricans, African-Americans, and Dominicans. In entering the dialogue about the persistence of Puerto Rican nationalism, I would like to point out its functioning in the context of contemporary neoliberal and globalizing socioeconomic patterns. On the one hand, at a moment when financial capital has constructed what Gareth Williams has termed a “universal negativity” based on “residual, redundant, or superfluous peoples, places, cultural practices, and histories,” it makes sense that those peoples resist their omission via the affirmations of their specificity oftentimes in a national discourse (2002 217). Furthermore, if in earlier stages the State was seen as the main controller of national representations and protector of its citizen’s rights, its contemporary relative absence necessitates the emergence of a civil society which, as George Yúdice points out, combines agents “based on national frameworks” with others partaking of internationalized forms of opposition to neoliberal trends (2003 34). As opposed to a rigid nationalism, the contemporary national discourse produced by local actors is but one stage in a process that Jesús Martín-Barbero has described as the “reinvention of myths and rituals through which this contradictory but still powerful identity is unmade and remade both from a local and a transnational perspective” (1993 48). In the case of Dominican-Puerto Rican Hip-Hop, Puerto Rican national imagery is a point of departure from which to assert a specific experience within a Caribbean framework against a homogenizing

musical market that has depleted genres such as Salsa and Reggaeton of creativity and originality.³ At the same time, this iconography is sampled from a Hip-Hop aesthetic that recontextualizes it as a basis for collaboration rather than exclusion.

“Jíbaro jop,” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLewJfIWPFc>) recorded with E.A. Flow, as the title already indicates, reclaims the national peasant archetype in affirming a specific cultural and political territory against foreign domination.⁴ A brief introduction featuring two musical elements associated with Puerto Ricanness situates the song in an iconoclastic Hip-Hop aesthetic. The string-dominated first segment is a sample of a danza, a genre which, as Angel G. Quintero Rivera explains, emerged with the landowning elites of the 1800s and eventually became a musical emblem of the island’s national identity (1998 268). The peacefulness and languor of the danza’s strings are stridently interrupted by the notes of a distorted cuatro, a musical instrument highlighted in jíbaro musical forms, the quintessentially national coquí frog, a muffled laugh, and the rattle of a machine gun. While both the danza and jíbaro music have been staples of a national ideology that is intimately linked to Eurocentric and classist view of island society, the song’s samples establish a productive contrast that invites to a reconsideration of the cited cultural elements:

If from the countryside to the city, I busted my ass for own stuff,
it is because in my sap there is a mixture of the bitter tastes of life
and a farm full of illusions a half acre away from the fields.

.....

Before the American, I will not kneel down nor have I paid him respects.
And that Palm Sunday I still have not taken out of my chest.
It is not a matter of racism, but I have to strike back,
and I cut the branch, but then I don’t see the fruit.
We are tired of the same, of leaping from childhood to adulthood.
I hit the street and went head first to the ground.
But I stand up with my head up and you better watch out,
as this cunning Dominican from Cibao does not mess around.
Shit, wake up, Puerto Rican, let’s build our dream.

Why judge our neighbor, if the one who feeds us
 dumps poison in my backyard?

[Si del campo a la ciudad yo me jodí por lo mío,
 es que en mi savia hay un menjurje de amarguras de vivir
 y una finca de ilusiones a media cuerda del field.

.....

Al Yanqui no me arrodillo ni le he rendío' respeto.
 Y aquel Domingo de Ramos no me lo he sacao' del pecho.
 No es cuestión de racismo, pero es que dao' no me quedo,
 y doy el tajo al racimo y después el fruto no veo.
 Estamos cansaos' de lo mismo, brincar de niño pa' viejo.
 Me choqué con la calle y de cocote pa'l suelo.
 Pero de frente me paro y ten mucho cuidao',
 que este cibaeño aguzao en esto no come cuento.
 Coño, despierta boricua, a construir nuestro sueño.
 ¿Por qué juzgar el vecino si el que nos da de comer
 echa en mi patio el veneno?]

This donning of a jíbaro identity as a way to reject U.S. abuses on the island is hardly a novelty and indeed partakes of an iconography widely linked to the glamorization of a pre-U.S. dominance agrarian society that was built and maintained through the exploitation of the peasantry and slaves. Furthermore, the song alludes to the 1937 Palm Sunday massacre of nationalists who, while victims of a deadly American repression, espoused the violent struggle for the defense of a suspect pure and Eurocentric Puerto Rican nation. The song's machine gun then echoes the anti-imperialist struggle symbolized by the jíbaro. At the same time, the report of the machine gun is more immediately linked, especially in the context of Hip-Hop, to the rampant violence of Puerto Rico's cities, a setting that justifies the allusion to emblems of a peace and a quality of life desired by urban dwellers. In a paradoxical way, the allusion to a "farm full of illusions" from the perspective of someone who has moved from "the countryside to the city," actually joins a tradition in Salsa which incorporates lyrical and musical allusions to

jíbaro culture in a way that defies the dichotomous relation between the jíbaro/rural/Eurocentric and urban/Afro-Puerto Rican cultural dimensions.⁵ The ample use of the cuatro and song-lyrics such as Ismael Rivera's "Mi Jaragual" and especially Bobby Valentín "El jíbaro y la naturaleza" posit the rural landscape as a utopia to be longed for by those who live with the least beneficial outcomes of the island radical industrialization. Thus, Sietenueve cites and joins a series of layered contexts that transcends the interpretation of the jíbaro as antithetical to Afro-Caribbean urban life.

The second half of the lyrics adds yet another interrogation of traditional Puerto Rican nationalism by highlighting its often attendant xenophobia. That is, his standing up to U.S. imperialism is not "a matter or racism" but much rather an act of correcting the unfairness of "cut[ting] the branch" and not "see[ing] the fruit." The racism denied by Sietenueve in his approach to the U.S. is actually more prevalent in Puerto Rican society in relation to Dominicans, "neighbor[s]" whom, as the rapper points out, are comparatively more severely judged by Puerto Ricans than the imperialistic U.S. With this line of thought established, Sietenueve's final call for Puerto Ricans' awakening from the perspective of a Dominican from the Cibao region affirms a Puerto Rican identity predicated not so much on a timeless essence but much rather on the specific juncture of the island's political relation to the U.S.. This emphasis on the positionality of Puerto Ricanness allows for the opening up of its ethnic ideologies to include a contemporary Dominicanness within its collective boundaries on the basis of a shared life in Puerto Rican territory that is impacted by U.S. imperialism. Furthermore, from the standpoint of self-identification, this song challenges the mutually exclusive thought concerning immigrant communities by affirming both ancestral and current locations.

Still, if what defines this aspect of Puerto Rican national identity is its connection to broader regional and ethnic contours, the emphasis on nationality seems excessive and unnecessary. The relational nature of the U.S. presence on the island hints at a potential explanation for the pervasiveness of national discourse. That is, if in the final analysis, when directed at the American political presence, what nationalism is decrying are social and political issues that are precipitated by a violation of national territory, then nationalism is a language that can serve as a medium for the construction of civil society. In the contemporary context,

neoliberalism has extended the same dynamic by blurring national borders to the benefit of multinational capital and at the expense of the local industries as well as labor and cultural markets. In that sense, rejections of disproportionate external influence and interrogations of social ills stemming from that influence are very often uttered in a national discourse. While there is always the possibility of regressive national affirmations that can reaffirm xenophobia and archaic social hierarchies, works by artists who delve into the social content of this national discourse ultimately can question its attendant ethnic boundaries and social hierarchies.

Imagined returns

So far the songs that I have analyzed by Sietenueve highlight the relative predominance of the Puerto Rican aspect of his national identity. However, along with his strategic clarifications of his Dominican heritage there are tracks which explore more directly this other facet of his experience and effectively construct a dual identity that transcends either/or binary notions of national allegiances. Furthermore, while the recognition that there is such a thing as a dual Puerto Rican-Dominican identity is an important step that has not been taken sufficiently, a subsequent exploration of the specific functioning of this subjectivity is necessary. With that in mind, Sietenueve's songs about the Dominican Republic display an aesthetic and imaginary link with the artist's ancestral culture compared to the more experiential rapport with his current location. This relationship is indeed similar to the utopian depictions of the symbolic homelands of Borinquen and Aztlán which respectively Nuyorican and Chicano artists and activists have devised. These served, in J. Jorge Klor de Alva's words, as "repositor[ies] of all shared values, the wellspring of resistance, and the object of nostalgic remembrances" (1989 75). In Sietenueve's case, there is a special emphasis on the role of aesthetics in constructing both a utopian ancestral land and an errant persona akin to the mobile maroon and migrant that has already framed his approach to Caribbeanness and Puerto Ricanness. This imaginative process then, is added to the different resources through which the second generation, as Ernesto Sagás and Sintia E. Molina tell us, "maneuver[s] within their limited opportunities and resources" so as to "create a transnational life (2004 9). As we will see, Sietenueve highlights a generalized lack of experiential contact with the Dominican Republic, as opposed to the

frequent returns of the first generation. Paradoxically, this very absence of grounding enables the mobility and imagination with which this artist constructs a link with his ancestral home.

In “Quisqueya,” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=24072smunf0>) Sietenueve, alongside Velcro and Welmo, emphasizes the common Caribbean framework shared by both islands and highlights the duality of his experience. His location in the song can be read as multivalent here in a plural Caribbean, or a Quisqueya of equal plurality considering the island’s Dominican and Haitian territories:

From Castillo to Barahona,
 from Puerto Plata to la Vega,
 there in San Carlos you illuminate
 Río Piedras and Villa Palmeras.
 I carry a green card
 with mangú in my veins.
 There is no other place in the world
 where people sweat happiness
 dancing with misery,
 where decent families
 live in dirt-floor homes.
 Here rhythms that hypnotize hips
 become entangled.
 If you don’t know anything about these lands,
 keep looking for your grandmother.
 It is the flavor of the Caribbean,

 A Puerto Rican loves you so much.
 Your essence beats in my heart.
 And the day I die,
 I want to give half of this body
 as compost for your land.

[De Castillo a Barahona,
 de Puerto Plata a la Vega,
 allí en San Carlos iluminas
 Río Piedras y Villa Palmeras.
 Porto tarjeta verde
 con el mangú entre las venas.
 No hay sitio en el mundo
 donde se sude alegría
 bailando con la miseria,
 donde hogares decentes
 viven en pisos de tierra.
 Aquí se enredan los ritmos
 que hipnotizan caderas.
 Si de estas tierras no sabes,
 sigue buscando a tu abuela.
 Es el sazón del Caribe,

 Tanto te ama un boricua.
 Late en mi pecho tu esencia
 y quiero dar el día en que me muera
 la mitad de este cuerpo
 pa' ser abono en tu tierra.]

Highlighting his nomadic nature, Sietenueve's traveler speaker touches upon key points within a broad Dominican territory that encompasses the geographic nation as well as the Puerto Rican neighborhoods of Río Piedras and Villa Palmeras, where Dominicans have settled since the late 1900s. While this nomadic self creates a noteworthy distance with relation to the Dominican Republic, as he is not from there, but visits there with idealizing eyes, he engages in his travels precisely because he has bloodlines that supersede legal boundaries. That is, the mangú (Dominican mashed plantains) that he has in his veins is the green card that gives him

permission to approach his Dominican culture, thereby positing a cultural approach to physical mobility over a legal definition of identity. In the end, his sense of belonging is completed and the distance is abridged when the speaker explicitly offers half of his body as compost for his parental homeland, thereby reaching a concrete physical aspect that contrasts with his initial travelling and thus distant self.

In “Mar y prosa” (literally “Sea and prose,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yyxCiR2K70>) this progression from an imaginary I to a concrete belonging self encompasses an aesthetic side that ultimately sheds light on the role Sietenueve’s art plays in his own self-fashioning. The title’s multiple meanings underscore the collaboration between diverse facets of the speaker’s aesthetic and cultural identity. Literally, the title alludes to the sea and the prose, which respectively insinuate a Caribbean Sea that allows for a travel between the islands and the writing that mediates the imagination of such a link. Moreover, these words evoke the word “mariposa,” Spanish for butterfly, which, beside interlinking mobility and beauty, also allude to Julia Álvarez’s historical novel *In the Time of the Butterflies* about the Mirabal Sisters, who were murdered for conspiring against Dominican dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo in 1960. In fact, on one level the song tells the story of the sisters and samples a news report about their life and final encounter with Trujillo’s security.

Interspersed with their story is the gradual approach of the speaker to their world, culminating in a fusion between him and the sisters into a collective us rich in artistic and political connotations. Initially the speaker underscores his initial distance from when he addresses the sister Patria as an object of desire from an external location:

For you, who slapped the empire’s cheeks,
for you, my whole muse, my open heart.
In you I say Patria, as blood beckons.
In you I say stop without mincing words,
without measuring the ocean or hours of being gagged.

.....

There were no astronauts casually walking around your star
letting abuse invade the land,

my free, sovereign, my adored Quisqueya.
 [A ti, que abofeteaste los cachetes del imperio.
 A ti, toda mi musa, mi corazón abierto.
 En ti yo digo Patria, como la sangre llama.
 En ti yo digo basta, sin medir las palabras
 sin medir el océano ni horas de mordaza.

.....
 No hubieron astronautas paseando por tu estrella,
 dejando que al abuso invadiera la tierra,
 mi libre, soberna, mi adorada Quisqueya.]

For Sietenueve's speaker Patria is an emblem intertwining Sietenueve's multiple aspirations. On a literal level, her name means fatherland, which here is aligned with Sietenueve's diasporic desire for a connection with his ancestral homeland. Furthermore, Sietenueve's desire underscores a double absence in that he not only lacks the concrete connection with the country of his parents but that country, whose star has not been walked around, is free and sovereign, unlike the star of the Puerto Rican flag and the island itself. Then both he and Puerto Rico are defined by their respective lacks of a connection to the Dominican Republic and political suzerainty. The Mirabal sister Patria also serves as an emblem of what the speaker desires and thus turns the empty space left by the lack into a path to be taken by him. She is the desired fatherland and by slapping the cheeks of the empire she has created a resistant example for the Speaker.

As the song progresses this gap of desire and absence is abridged by the emergence of aesthetic activity as a legitimate political praxis:

Like a butterfly, roaming around the harvest,
 María, Patria, and you, poetry, Minerva, fly,
 as if you had met me in another life,
 as if your pains ran into me.
 And little by little fire burned our senses.
 Today your sea and your prose, all your written verse,

and an entire universe covered with love, covered with love.

[Como una mariposa, paseando la cosecha,
vuelan María, Patria, y tú, poesía, Minerva,
como si en otra vida me hubieses conocido,
como si tus dolores se encontraran conmigo.
Y poco a poco el fuego nos quemó los sentidos.
Hoy tu mar y tu prosa, todo tu verso escrito
y todo un universo forrado de cariño, forrado de cariño.]

While the political example of the sisters plays a key role in most of the poem, the speaker's craft as a wordsmith is what helps him shape the contours of the signifiers linked to the sisters and the national ideology they represent. The role of poetry here is hinted not only in the florid language employed, but in the special apostrophe to Minerva, whose name's connection to the Greek goddess of poetry the speaker himself underlines. As the sisters roam like a butterfly, and indeed like a floating signifier unmoored from their literal narrative by the speaker, they are able to access an open-ended temporal dimension where they have met the speaker in a past life. Subsequently, their meeting sparks a fire that has burned the senses of an us that poignantly includes the speaker and thus marks a grammatical fusion between him and the sisters. In turn, this union leaves a general loving emotion in the cosmos created by the song, an atmosphere that hints at the satisfaction and completion of a subject who has attained both a transcendental link with his ancestral land as well as a political and artistic *raison d'être* through the example set by the Mirabal sisters.

Conclusion

The sense of fulfillment and completion attained in the latter poetic journey underscores Sietenueve's loyalty to his Dominican roots, which in turn establish his dual identity as a Dominican-Puerto Rican. In that sense, the question about which side prevails within the national identity of second generation is answered by a both/and that transcends the exclusive and binary nature of the either/or option. Sietenueve, like his fellow rappers Velcro and Welmo, serves as a mouthpiece for a generation which makes explicit a Dominican-Puerto Rican experience that surely predated them but which has so far not been named as a legitimate

discursive category or explored as such. At the same time, the duality of this experience and its textual representation ultimately question the very dynamic of national identity. That is, less than an essence that can be held by an a priori complete subject, this is a discursive practice that actually questions the borders and preconceived icons of a collective identity. Thus, Sietenueve is a Puerto Rican national inasmuch as he seizes the icons of this ideology, such as the jíbaro, and questions the exclusion of Dominicans from Puerto Rican national discourse. Likewise, he is Dominican insofar as he can imagine a connection to his ancestral homeland via the poetic recontextualization of the iconic Mirabal sisters. Yet, the inherited exclusionary and essentialist nature of nationalism could make it an undesirable ideology for an immigrant who might be better off exploring other identity facets in a context where the State as embodiment of the nation has become increasingly irrelevant. Indeed, Sietenueve's insistence on nationality serves to actually counter the emerging role of the market as determinant of the life of much-too-displaceable and expendable workforce and of the culture produced by artists like himself. Nationality then functions as a medium for the construction of a civil society and an artistic will that resists the mere exclusion or consumption by the current markets. Moreover, rather than the homogenizing and idealistic Puerto Rican or Dominican imagery constructed by the State, Sietenueve samples these national icons from a Hip-Hop representational matrix that fragments them and adds the jarring din of contemporary contradictions and tensions. In a way, his use of a Salsa-tinged Hip-Hop makes perfect sense. From Hip-Hop he can sample Puerto Rico and open it up as an image that is able to reflect better the true contours of contemporary life on the island and traditional Puerto Rican enclaves. The Puerto Rico that emerges in this representation is inhabited by living Dominican margins which both revive the island's culture in the face of the menacing neoliberal context and reconnect it to a Caribbean dimension that has been a source of cultural and political capital since day one. Out of that exchange comes a Dominican-Puerto Rican identity to which Puerto Rico owes more than it has recognized.

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Notes

¹ In linking Sietenueve's Hip-Hop to a Caribbean network I am resuming a conversation that Mayra Santos started during the years when Puerto Rican Hip-Hop first began incorporating Dancehall Reggae beats in the process that would lead to the rise of Reggaeton. While Reggaeton's links to the Caribbean may not be as prominent as they were back then, at that moment they were part of a Pan-Caribbean utopian impetus within local Hip-Hop artists. Santos hypothesizes that the basic Dance Hall rhythm may have been incorporated by Puerto Rican artists "not only due to its connection to Caribbeanness and urbanity (in terms of rhythmic conceptions)" but also because it is "another element in the development of the musical expressions of urban Afro-diasporic music from circular migration's Caribbean frontier, this time from Jamaica" (my translation; 1997 361).

² Raquel Z. Rivera has explored in depth the interaction between African-Americans and artists of Afro-Caribbean and Latino-Caribbean artists in *New York Ricans From the Hop-Hop Zone*. In fact, in order to open up Hip-Hop for a discussion of its Caribbean diasporic constituencies, Rivera suggests the use of the term "hip-hop zone," which refers to a "a fluid cultural space, a zone whose boundaries are an internal and external matter of debate" (2003 15).

³ In seeing musical embodiments of national identities as counter to homogenizing and globalizing patterns I concur with Frances Aparicio and Cándida Jáquez, who state that: "in the (post)colonial context of the Caribbean, and of Puerto Rico in particular, popular musics still play a significant role in the articulation of nationalism, particularly at a time when a globalizing economy destabilizes local identities and rearticulates them" (2002 4). The rearticulation to which they refer specifically manifests a depoliticized and whitened Salsa that, according to Aparicio "has been mainstreamed in Puerto Rico because of its newly found international and westernized legitimacy, a sort of de-Africanization ascribed to by the gaze/ear of the dominant Other" (1998 73-74). Likewise, Wayne Marshall tells a parallel story in the case of Reggaeton's "stylistic features that propels today's radio-friendly, club-ready confections" (2004 51).

⁴ Raquel Z. Rivera has cogently analyzed this song's working out of the proverbial "us and them" ideological kink in fashioning a more inclusive "us" (2007 226-228). As I hope my analysis clarifies, in order to reach an inclusive "us," there is a necessary redefining of national myths, icons, and hierarchies, which the song carries out.

⁵ Quintero Rivera cites influential cultural and musical critics such as Antonio S. Pedreira and Héctor Campos Parsi as examples of thinkers who partake of the perceived cultural and geographic distance between, on the one hand, the more Europeanized and rural jíbaro music and, worldview and, on the other hand, the more African-influenced urban and coastal sectors. He goes on to establish actual ethnic and musical links between both in redefining jíbaro music, especially its most popular seis form, as an "ethnic amalgam" and not limited to the mountainous rural areas of the island (1998 225-227).